



Local Labour

New policy ideas for communities

A collection of essays edited by **James Hulme**



New Local Government Network (NLGN) is an independent think tank that seeks to transform public services, revitalise local political leadership and empower local communities. NLGN is publishing this pamphlet as part of a series of essay collections featuring contributions from all three main political parties. The views expressed are therefore those of the authors and not necessarily those of NLGN.

© NLGN June 2009
All rights reserved
Published by NLGN

Prepared by NLGN
First floor, New City Court, 20 St. Thomas Street, London SE1 9RS
Tel 020 7357 0051 . Email info@nlgn.org.uk . www.nlgn.org.uk

Contents

	About the authors	4
	Foreword	8
	Rt Hon. Hazel Blears MP	
1	Local Labour Lost?	10
	<i>Jessica Asato and James Hulme</i>	
2	Change over the last 10 years	18
	<i>Mayor Jules Pipe, Mayor of London Borough of Hackney</i>	
3	Labour can set country free through sport	24
	<i>Rt. Hon Andy Burnham MP, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport</i>	
4	How Labour councils communicate with young people	29
	<i>Councillor Steve Reed, Leader of Lambeth Council</i>	
5	A new approach to regions	35
	<i>Councillor Stephen Houghton, Leader of Barnsley Council</i>	
6	Leading Lancashire	41
	<i>Councillor Hazel Harding, Leader of Lancashire County Council</i>	

About the Authors

Jessica Asato

Jessica Asato is Acting Director of the New Labour pressure group Progress. She was previously a researcher at the Social Market Foundation think tank, specialising in health policy, as well as a former Chair of the Young Fabians, the UK's only youth think tank.

She now sits as an Executive Member of the Fabian Society. Jessica has also been a former Vice Chair of Young Labour and worked for the Labour Party during the 2005 General Election campaign.

In July 2008, Jessica founded the Gareth Butler History Trust, in the memory of her late husband, to fund history trips for disadvantaged young people.

Rt. Hon Hazel Blears MP

Hazel Blears was elected Member of Parliament for Salford in 1997. She was appointed Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Health in June 2001, and promoted within the Department of Health to the role of Minister for Public Health, in May 2002.

In June 2003 she moved to the Home Office, promoted to Minister of State and she had responsibility for crime reduction, policing, community safety and counter-terrorism. In May 2006, Hazel was appointed Chair of the Labour Party and Minister without Portfolio at the Cabinet Office.

From June 2007 - June 2009, Hazel was Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

During the 1997-2001 Parliament, Hazel was Vice President of the Local Government Association, Vice Chair of the Home Affairs Select Committee, Party Development Co-ordinator and a member of the Health and Culture Media and Sport backbench committees.

Hazel was Secretary to the Community Health Councils, Chair of the Motor Cycling Group and a member of others including: Sustainable Energy, Homelessness and Housing Needs, Public Health and Primary Care.

Hazel is a member of TGWU, Usdaw and Co-operative Action. She is a former member of the Labour Party's National Policy Forum. She was appointed to the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party in October 2003.

Rt. Hon Andy Burnham MP

Andy Burnham was appointed as Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport in January 2008. He is the MP for Leigh in Greater Manchester, elected in June 2001.

Prior to that Andy was: Chief Secretary to the Treasury (June 2007 to January 2008); Minister of State for Delivery and Reform at the Department of Health (2006 to June 2007); Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Immigration, Citizenship and Nationality at the Home Office (2005-06) and Parliamentary Private Secretary to Ruth Kelly, Transport Secretary (2004) and David Blunkett, Home Secretary (2003-04).

He was also a member of the Health Select Committee (2001-03). Previous posts include: special adviser to Chris Smith, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1998-2001); administrator for the Football Task Force (1998); researcher at the NHS Confederation (1997); and researcher to Tessa Jowell MP (1994-97).

Councillor Hazel Harding

Hazel Harding was first elected to the County Council in 1985 representing Rossendale West Division. She chaired the County Council in 1997/98 and was the Chair of the Education and Cultural Services Committee from April 1998 until 2001 when she was elected as Leader of the County Council.

She previously served on all the major County Committees. Hazel was also a Non-Executive Director of Burnley Health Care (NHS) Trust and was a Board Member for the Lancashire Learning and Skills Council. She was a member of the Local Government Association Education & Lifelong Learning Executive, member of the Children & Young People's Board and is now Chair of the Safer Communities Board.

She received the CBE in 2006 for services to Local Government in Lancashire. She is involved locally with community groups, in particular the after-school club which she co-founded.

Councillor Stephen Houghton

Councillor Stephen Houghton represents the Cudworth Ward. He was elected in May 2008 and his term of office expires in 2012. He is the Leader of Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council, the Leader of the Labour Group and Chair of Cabinet. Councillor Houghton has served on the Council since 1988.

Councillor Houghton also sits on the following Outside Bodies: Barnsley Development Agency Board, Barnsley MBC and Barnsley Health Authority Joint Agency Group, Barnsley Miller Partnership Ltd., Boulder Bridge Liaison Committee, Education Partnership Board, Joint Committee for the Appointment of Members of the South Yorkshire Police Authority, Leeds City Region Forum, LGA General Assembly, LGA Urban Commission, LGA Strategy & Finance Policy & Review Group, Local Government Yorkshire & the Humber, One Barnsley Board, Sheffield City Region Forum, SIGOMA, South Yorkshire Leader's Meeting and the Yorkshire & Humberside Regional Assembly.

James Hulme

James Hulme is Head of Communications, responsible for media and external relations at NLGN.

In 2008 he worked on behalf of the Barack Obama presidential campaign in Philadelphia and has worked on a number of UK General Election campaigns.

His recent publications include *Glad to be GLA? Making London government more accountable*, *Lords of our Manor? How a reformed House of Lords can better represent the UK*, *What's in a name? Celebrating local achievement through public spaces* and *Little Brother: Getting the balance right on surveillance powers*.

Mayor Jules Pipe

Jules Pipe was re-elected as Mayor of Hackney for a second term in May 2006, having become the borough's first directly elected Mayor in October 2002. As one of only twelve directly elected Mayors in the country, Jules has overseen the transformation of Council finances and the delivery of Council services, resulting in a net increase of 50 percentage points in resident satisfaction, and a three-star rating from the Audit Commission expected in February 2008.

Since Jules Pipe became Mayor, Hackney is seeing the fastest fall in crime in London, the establishment of five new secondary schools and the successful campaign to put Hackney on the tube map.

Since 2002, Hackney has seen the third-lowest Council Tax increase of any London borough, with Council Tax frozen for the past three years. Jules is at the forefront of Hackney's ambitious plans and aspirations for the borough's 2012 legacy.

Councillor Steve Reed

Steve Reed was first elected to Lambeth Council in 1998 and represents Brixton Hill Ward. Following two years as vice-chair of social services and a member of the London Councils Grants Committee, he was elected Deputy Leader of the Council in 2000. From 2001 he also held the Education portfolio and oversaw negotiations for Lambeth's first new secondary school for 40 years.

Following Labour's defeat in the 2002 elections, Steve was elected Leader of the Opposition. He led the Labour Group through opposition to a landslide victory in 2006, Labour's only majority gain in the country that year, when he was elected Leader of the Council. In 2008, The Audit Commission awarded Lambeth Three Stars moving it from one Star Authority and making it the fastest improving Council in London.

As Leader, Steve has described the Council's purpose as 'delivering quality, tackling inequality'. He sits on the Local Government Association's Safer Communities Board, and is Vice-Chair of the Central London Partnership, a public-private partnership addressing issues affecting central London.

Foreword

The days when titanic ideological struggles were played out in our council chambers, when Eric Pickles could apply Hayek to the workforce of Bradford council, or Ted Knight could call for the Fourth International to start in Lambeth, are gone. And few are saddened at their passing. The days of councils operating their own foreign policy might have appealed to a few ideologues, but they left local electorates out in the cold. In the 1990s, a new spirit has guided local councillors, based on the simple truth that local councils are there to provide local services, reflecting local needs and priorities. It has meant that standards have improved, councils are better places to work, and local people get ever-greater value for money for their taxes.

But that does not mean that all councils are the same, or that which party controls the town hall is an irrelevance. The big ideological walls may have been torn down, but the values and priorities which underpin a council's performance is still a matter of democratic politics. That means that it matters whether your council is Labour or Tory/Liberal/BNP or Green. It even matters whether your ward councillor is Labour or not. Although if you were to cut me, I would bleed Labour, this is no simple appeal to tribalism. It is a case of whose values and ideas are best suited to today's challenges. The truth is that in a period of global uncertainty, recession, housing market collapse and business failures, we need elected representatives who are instinctively people who believe taking action is better than standing by, and who stand with the most vulnerable. The challenge of the age is defined by whether you believe in an active state, collective action, and social solidarity, or whether you leave it to the market and the individual. That's why the Americans chose Obama over McCain, and why local voters should vote Labour rather than any of the others.

I will always resist the idea that councils are merely units of local administration, outposts of the central state disguised as local democracy. I want to see a new municipalism in the UK, with more powers passed to local councils, communities and citizens. For me, it's not just about reviving some of that civic pride and municipal enterprise that characterised so much of the

country before 1945; it about making localism the way we live tomorrow. When I look across the Thames from the House of Commons towards County Hall, I don't just think of the days of the GLC, (or even the London Aquarium). I think of the London County Council under 'progressive' control in the late Victorian period: a socialist administration which built new sewers, public baths, affordable homes, public parks, and major projects such as the Blackwall Tunnel. Later, under Herbert Morrison in the 30s, the LCC cleared the slums, built new schools, and established a green belt around the city. Easily derided by the advocates of central control and big institutions as 'gas and water socialism', in reality this is the kind of socialism which has the biggest impact on people's lives. Practical politics which delivers real improvements – that's what Labour should be all about.

Today, the spirit of municipalism lives on in progressive Labour authorities. This latest Progress/NLGN publication is further proof that it is the Labour Party with the ideas and energy to lead in local government. We have the young councillors with passion and vision. We have the experienced hands with the commitment to lead their communities. We have a Labour Government committed to devolving power and supporting local councils and communities.

No one is pretending that the next few months are going to be a walk in the park. The scale of the recession was matched by the boldness of the recent budget. Our politics is being turned upside down, and although the kaleidoscope is still in flux, it clear that there will be no return to 'business as usual'. This is as true of local government as it is of national government or international institutions. One thing is clear: it is Labour's values which offer the best way forward through the storms ahead, and it is the Conservative Party which has firmly planted itself on the wrong side of the historic argument. That's the choice for local councils, as it will be for the government of the country when the time comes to choose.

Rt Hon. Hazel Blears MP

1 *Local Labour Lost?*

Jessica Asato and James Hulme

As a party in local government, Labour's decline over the past fifteen years has been steady and well documented. From the high water mark of 1996, where Labour captured former Tory heartlands like Basildon and Trafford Council, the party's support now resembles a retreating army. It has lost control over former strongholds like Liverpool, Birmingham and Sheffield and now, at the time of writing, only controls two cities in England. Its support base in the South East, the South West and the Midlands has vaporised, with Labour very much the third party in some regions. Its County Council base fares even worse, with further losses predicted in the 2009 Local Elections.

Some will point to this decline as an inevitable by-product of Labour being in national office for so many years. It is certainly true that the Conservative period in office from 1979-1997 coincided with a decline in its support at a local government level.

The purpose of this essay, however, is not to necessarily address why Labour has shrunk to such a limited body in local government, but to assess some of the policy options by which Labour could regain support and initiative through popular and progressive action.

The party itself has arguably lost some of the radicalism that typified the early days of the transition between opposition and government under Tony Blair. Labour came in to power promising that "local decision-making should be less constrained by central government, and also more accountable to local people", pledging to introduce directly-elected mayors, an end to council tax capping, directly elected regional government and fair distribution of the government grant. Many of these ambitious ideas have been hampered or forgotten over time and a sense remains that Labour has yet to fully recalibrate a new vision for decentralisation and a modern role for local government.

A prevailing theme throughout this essay is the need to assign greater power

and potential to influence to local civic leaders. Local leaders and their councillor colleagues have the democratic legitimacy and accountability to act as advocate for their local communities and make decisions based on the will of the people and their greater good. It is however too often the case that the ability to demonstrate strong leadership is hamstrung by an inability to directly influence priorities over some issues that represent the greatest concern of local residents. Labour's direction over the last twelve years has sounded devolutionary in principle but has failed to deliver the goods in practice. Empowerment, double devolution, localism, are buzzwords which have peppered ministerial speeches for too long without genuinely shifting the necessary power and financial muscle to the level of democratic authority which might be able to use it best.

Recent legislation from the Department of Communities and Local Government on community empowerment has disappointed many with its limited nod towards further decentralisation, despite Secretary of State Hazel Blears being a passionate advocate for local government and devolution. Similarly, many have felt that reform to the business rates legislation lacks a requited devolutionary "bite". In short, it seems as if Labour has lost the imagination and bravery to be properly devolutionary, and while we don't claim to have all the answers, the following paragraphs outline the key areas which Labour could seize to show its localist zeal.

One of the areas which needs most urgent attention is Labour's inability to successfully reform local government finance. Local government in the UK is one of the most centralised systems of funding in Europe and council tax remains the most unpopular tax in Britain, although in recent years local authorities – with pressure from Whitehall – have kept increases to a minimum. The tax itself, however, remains fundamentally unfair, based as it is on an outdated property valuation rather than income or ability to pay.

Councils in the UK currently lack the kind of fiscal levers available to many of their counterparts in Europe and the United States. One option for reform could be to extend the number of council tax bands available and allow local authorities to vary how much they charge householders per band. Currently the highest band, H, is for properties worth over £320,000, meaning that a property worth that amount is charged the same as one costing £5,000,000. The Government should look to introduce two higher bands, perhaps on

properties over £750,000 and £2,000,000 and use the additional revenue to reduce the amount charged to lower and middle-range houses.

Moreover, the debate over finance should not merely be seen through the prism of taxation. The current economic downturn necessitates a new role for local authorities to be at the very heart of their economies. Economic regeneration cannot simply come from the centre; it requires local innovation too. To support this we would encourage Labour to examine a number of fiscal tools to boost local enterprise and economies.

The party should look closely at the Conservative's proposal to allow local authorities to offer variable business rates. Whilst we do not advocate the simple relocalisation of business rates, which would be a regressive step that would benefit already wealthy areas and drain money from poorer places, allowing councils to vary their rates would allow them to offer incentives to new and fledgling investment. For example, a council could offer lower rates as an incentive for a new business to invest in their area.

The point about this measure is not that it would simply lead to councils being able to increase taxation, but give local authorities the ways and means in which to balance taxation to a level best suited to their locality. Any reduction in rates would however have to be balanced by raising rates on other businesses, on the surface not a particularly appealing idea, but one in which could give local leaders a powerful tool in shaping their local areas. For example, lower business rates on "positive" investments such as a new business offering highly skilled employment could be offset by increasing rates on businesses that have a perceived "negative" impact on the locality such as betting shops, fast food outlets and lapdancing establishments.

On the environment, Labour could entrust more power with local authorities to tackle climate change. Legislation is now in place for the UK to reduce its carbon emissions by 60% by 2050, however many of the levers to affect change are driven from Whitehall or unelected quangos. Whilst the Government has shown support for a personal carbon allowance scheme, the potential bureaucratic and logistic difficulties of such a scheme could be avoided by giving communities and local authorities targets to reduce the emissions from their area and link them to financial rewards and penalties. Under this system, local authorities would receive additional

grant for reducing their emissions or a reduction for failing to do so, thereby introducing a financial and not merely an altruistic reason for meeting the climate change challenge.

We would also suggest that Labour needs to step back from compelling citizens into environmental activity and instead use positive incentives and encouragement to change their behaviour – a “nudge” rather than a “budge” if you like. It has become clear that Labour, as well as councils of other political persuasions, have failed to convince the public of the viability of its pay-as-you-throw rubbish and alternative weekly rubbish collections, despite evidence that they do help to reduce the amount of household waste thrown away.

Whilst the policy might work in practice, the adverse publicity has unarguably damaged public perception of local authority waste management. However, using a system of positive financial incentives to reduce the amount of household waste could benefit both the environment and individual household income. If local authorities offered financial incentives for reducing the amount of waste thrown away, for instance through rebates on the household’s council tax bill, whilst also giving all occupants an opportunity to recycle all relevant materials and household waste, councils could be seen as encouraging positive behaviour without using the stick of compulsion.

Furthermore, councils could look creatively at additional financial incentives to promote green behaviour. Whilst planning regulations have been eased to allow residents to install micro generation energy sources such as wind turbines to their properties, the initial cost of the technology and the need to start with a property which is properly insulated and energy efficient restricts the amount of people able to invest in it. However, local authorities could offer interest free loans to allow local households to make their homes more energy efficient, either through switching to renewable sources of energy or through investing in home insulation.

We would also urge Labour to reflect upon the lessons of the recent debates over Eco-Towns and alter the way in which it approaches new investment in housing. New property developments are notoriously complex to introduce, partly due to strangulating planning regulations and often because of opposition from local residents. Many of the opponents to the thirteen proposed Eco-Towns have been unfairly characterised as NIMBYs when in fairness they have

raised legitimate concerns about the lack of infrastructure building associated with the projects. In short, merely building houses is not enough, when you also need transport infrastructure, shops and local public services.

How then can Labour promote sustainable housing with the very real need for additional properties to be built in the UK? One solution would be to accelerate the Prime Minister's desire to see more councils building social housing, but as a prerequisite to challenge local authorities to build properties that are fully energy efficient, easily accessible to public transport and that are powered by as much renewable energy as possible.

Whilst the Government has allocated a £100m package for new council-built eco-homes, it should go further to insist that all new builds are as environmentally friendly as possible. To make this a reality, councils should be given additional fiscal flexibility to borrow money against future rental incomes to invest in new housing projects. There is not only an environmental urgency to this solution, but it is also one that could reduce the amount of people trapped in fuel poverty by reducing the amount of energy they need and begin to tackle the historical underinvestment in social housing.

We would also like to see local authorities given greater freedoms – and responsibilities – to influence key public services such as policing and health.

In terms of policing, central control can leave some communities feeling that local police are not dealing with their concerns and targeting the wrong areas. Whilst the Government's investment in neighbourhood policing has brought the police closer to their communities, local leaders still do not have the required control over how police are managed and deployed and are still shackled by Whitehall-driven targets.

Government proposals to bypass local government and introduce directly elected policy boards have sensibly been dropped, however local accountability could be enhanced by allowing councils leaders dual responsibility with their local borough commander to set local crime priorities and the deployment of police officers. This would allow local politicians to be directly accountable for policing and consult more widely with local people about their priorities.

Local health outcomes are another area in which councils are seen to have overall responsibility and yet in practice have limited influence. With around

80% of NHS spending now under the responsibility of locally directed but unelected Primary Care Trusts (PCTs), their decisions will inevitably have fundamental ramifications on local priorities. We would like to see a much greater role for elected representatives in the running of such Trusts.

One option might be that if a PCT struggles to meet its financial and performance targets, the trust and local council should be allowed to appoint joint senior management posts if there is organisational and popular consent. Moreover, as a immediate step we would like to see a single chief executive appointed to oversee the PCT and local authority with a trust board made up mostly of elected councillors, as opposed to non-executive directors appointed by central government's Appointments Commission.

As a further sign of dedication towards devolution, Labour could look to address the creeping "quangocracy" and make good a promise made by Gordon Brown in 1995 to reduce the number of quangos under a Labour government. Quangos currently supervise spending worth £123bn a year, about 21 per cent of overall public spending. That compares with just 15 per cent for local authorities. They have vast influence over spending priorities and final decision making from transport to planning, housing to education.

Whilst we accept that under any form of governance the state will require a number of arms-length organisations to act as delivery agents, the Government should hold a review of quango powers and spend in England and Wales, with a view to ensuring that any powers, and the money that goes with it, that can as easily be held by locally elected government be taken away from quangos and returned to locally accountable organisations. The rationalisation of an often crowded field of quangos could help to simplify public understanding of service delivery with greater accountability of spending and decision making.

It should be assessed as to whether we really need three quangos dedicated to carbon reduction, as we have with the Carbon Trust, Energy Savings Trust and Envirowise, when surely one would suffice. Does the state really need the Adult Learning Inspectorate; Investors in People UK; Quality Improvement Agency for Life Long Learning and the Sector Skills Development Agency, when these organisations replicate much of each other's work? Moreover, given the current state of the UK's public finances, wouldn't a move to

reorganise the number of quangos save money that can be redirected to frontline services, as well as strengthening public accountability?

Finally, Labour needs to develop a new narrative on developing civic leadership. The Conservatives have suggested a bold extension to Labour's policy on directly elected mayors, promising one in twelve cities in England and it is vital that Labour develops a coherent approach to this. The Conservative scheme is not without fault – there is for example strong leadership that already exists at the moment in councils such as Manchester – but it should require Labour to reassess its approach to the model. Whilst elected mayors are by no means a panacea, they do offer a different form of leadership and accountability and, in examples such as the Mayor of London, can give local people a stronger voice when lobbying central government. At the very least we urge Labour to seriously look at how it can make more elected mayors a reality.

Labour should also take interest in the dynamics of the relationship between Boris Johnson, who is arguably the Conservative's most powerful local politician, and the national party. Whilst motivated by a Conservative ideology, Johnson has shown that he can disagree with his party's national agenda when it counteracts what is best for his region. His views on an amnesty for illegal immigrants and implementing the 'living wage' are examples that spring to mind. He has shown that it is possible for politicians of the same party to offer different solutions to the issues of different areas and this does not represent division, but a necessary by-product of localism and prioritising the needs of local people. Labour would be wise to assess how they can introduce different forms of local leadership as part of a diverse form of governance. This means Labour must also worry less about differences in priorities between local authorities, the so-called postcode lottery – true devolution requires that local people drive objectives, not central government. By all means let's ensure that there are higher minimum standards of provision at local level, but if we are to embark on a grown-up debate about devolution we have to accept levels of difference.

For Labour in local government these are only a small number of options and ideas to reconstruct and reform its vision for devolution and decentralisation. As you would expect, not all answers are here and we have not even touched upon the local authority options for reforming social care, transport, culture

and sport and other crucial areas of policy. The challenge for Labour, however, is to match its often pro-devolution rhetoric with real reform, not just putting in place new duties and agreements but devolving real powers and responsibility and putting faith in the local state to deliver. Labour must embrace the reasoning that while the central state has an important role to play, it certainly does not hold all the answers. It is by no means an easy journey, but it is one that is vital should Labour want to regain its place as the party of local government.

2 *Change over the last 10 years*

Mayor Jules Pipe

Ten years ago Hackney was run down, with high crime levels, failing schools and some of the worst social housing in the country. Regeneration in the borough was limited to the measured progression of massive estate regeneration schemes, the result of housing transfers and gap-funding bids made to the government in the early 1990s. Their very size meant that some of the last phases of these programmes are only now being built out; the last block of the once infamous Holly Street estate, yards away from Tony Blair's former Hackney home in Queensbridge, is now a pile of rubble.

Huge gains have been made for local communities from such developments: a human-scale streetscape, decent housing, unsurprisingly a huge reduction in crime, and a significant drop in demand at doctors' surgeries.

Five years of a hung council in the late nineties and the consequent absence of political leadership meant that new schemes failed to be progressed such as the badly needed redevelopment of Woodberry Down, potentially the largest scheme of its kind in Europe. Few new ideas were developed and, crucially, there was a failure to learn from any shortcomings of ongoing projects.

This hiatus in leadership from within the local authority left the way open for a New Deal for Communities programme (NDC) to fill the void in the south of the borough, the pointedly named "Shoreditch Our Way" or ShOW. Hampered at first by the secessionist stance of the board, the organisation was skilfully transformed into what is today Shoreditch Trust, the award-winning regeneration agency.

Shoreditch Trust went beyond simple housing renewal and addressed the Labour Government's key neighbourhood renewal themes, including neighbourhood management, crime and community safety, health and wellbeing, education and worklessness, and community engagement. It now contributes across Hackney, through the Local Strategic Partnership, and is ensuring its future sustainability through the development of social enterprise projects.

Many of the outcomes Shoreditch Trust seeks to deliver could – and should – have been the work of the local authority across the borough. However, in 2001, promises to the community of regeneration and transformation would have been seen as meaningless rhetoric from a council that couldn't even collect the rubbish. Regeneration had to begin with the local authority and its basic service provision. Whilst restoring governance and financial control within the Council, we first invested in the basics of cleaner streets and addressing the one in five streetlights that were out.

There could have been no greater disincentive for the unemployed to come off benefits for a job offer, which could be short term or probationary, than the two-thirds of a year it would take to restore benefit payments. Transforming the worst benefits system in the country into one of the best would remove one of the most significant barriers to social inclusion, and it was made an explicit political priority.

Ten years ago no money was spent on pavements and roads. Today, caring for the fabric of the public realm goes beyond paving slabs and tarmac. Even as these were being addressed, a resident once memorably said, “that's all very well, but we need places to go to at the end of these roads”.

With the largest amount of green space of the inner London boroughs, investment in parks was crucial but would have delivered little without the turnaround and buy-in of the parks workforce. Each year they win more green flags, indicating a service with development plans and the engagement of residents.

Investing in what matters to residents meant correcting built legacies from both the recent and distant past, including not one but three closed swimming pools: one a doomed Millennium project open for just eighteen months; an outdoor lido closed within months of inheriting it from the GLC in 1986; and a crumbling Edwardian bath house. Now we have the second most popular leisure centre in London and the capital's only outdoor heated Olympic-sized pool that sees more than 100,000 visits a year. Due to the economic downturn the bath house is having to wait its turn, but a partnership between the Council, the PCT and others could see a healthy living centre built around the listed pool.

All this has been achieved with no new borrowing or service cuts for the past six years and keeping the council tax at the same level for the past five years.

Results from the recent MORI survey of Hackney residents suggest that the change is evident with a remarkable 12-point increase over the last two years in residents' satisfaction with the area as a place to live.

From now to 2012 and beyond

The impact of the recession is double-edged. Whilst the availability of private capital and opportunity of capital receipts are greatly diminished, there are the benefits of declining construction costs, greater availability of skilled labour, opportunities for debt restructuring with lower interest rates, and a stronger position for contract negotiations.

The next few years will see us maximise opportunities from unprecedented investment in Hackney, which is transforming the borough's social and economic position within the capital: developments such as the extension of the East London Line that connects Hackney to the tube network for the first time from 2010 with four new stations. We will re-develop our town centres Hackney Central and Dalston, key transport hubs through which an improved retail offer could keep more money in the local economy.

There will be a total of 5 new city academies open by 2010, and all existing secondary schools, plus half of our primary schools, will be rebuilt or refurbished over the next decade and a half. The flight of so many middle-class parents of means, as their children approach eleven, is already slowing, helping to reduce the churn of residents and build community cohesion.

Having now achieved a two-star rating for the borough's ALMO will release £225 million to complete the Decent Homes programme. Woodberry Down will move forward, providing new homes for 10,000 people, maximising the number that will be family-sized – another vital priority in our borough.

Olympics

As host to around 30 per cent of the 2012 Olympic Park, Hackney is part of the biggest regeneration programme in Europe and the opportunities from the games are unprecedented. However, all those involved in the Games must recover fully the optimism and excitement that existed before the economic downturn. Unwise and ultimately undeliverable statements about significant cost-cutting, as well as the temptations of safer yet legacy-free options have

regularly cast doubt on delivering the vision we have for creating a new quarter for London beyond 2012.

The Media Centre at the heart of our plans for Hackney Wick, for example, will play host to around 20,000 or so journalists and broadcasters for the duration of the Games. But our concern as a local authority is not six weeks in the summer of 2012, it's about ensuring that the Games delivers a lasting legacy that will improve the lives and life chances of Hackney people.

We have campaigned to ensure a lasting legacy use for the media centre so that it becomes the economic hub for the new Wick neighbourhood, providing highly skilled jobs. The unavailability of sufficient private finance has encouraged conditions where short-term considerations looked to completely overshadow legacy. By allowing the use of contingency sums contained within the Olympic budget, the Government has chosen to invest for the long term and given the opportunity for the local vision of a digital village for the growth of creative industries – already a significant part of Hackney's economy.

Five borough MAA

The five Labour Olympic boroughs are working together on an agreement with Government that will secure the legacy we want to see for east London. We are focusing on the link between getting people into work and the affordability of housing.

The employment rate for residents of social housing in the five Olympic boroughs is just 47 per cent and these boroughs all have a significantly higher proportion of social housing than elsewhere in London. This is a difficult situation to change. Families have traditionally moved out once they improve on their financial situation, leaving behind the less economically successful. The basic principles of allocating social homes to those most in need mean that the replacement tenants are likely to be unemployed.

We are looking at housing nominations across the five boroughs, at incentivising employment through the criteria for housing allocation, and negotiating with DWP to make stopping and starting housing benefit claims flexible and more responsive for those seeking work.

The housing market does not serve our residents – demand vastly outstrips supply and supply costs vastly more than our residents can afford. There's a danger the Olympics will put even more pressure on house prices and private rent levels. We will continue to work with the different agencies to increase the supply of family-sized housing, to promote greater flexibility to move between different tenures, and to create the conditions for the private rented sector to become a more viable alternative to social housing.

The housing and employment legacy of the Olympic Park and the work the boroughs are masterplanning throughout the Lower Lea Valley are a once in a generation opportunity to bring an end to the uniquely poor position of east London in relation to the rest of the capital. We will resist pressure both to maximise the return for the developers selling one and two-bed flats that will end up as buy-to-lets and for east London to meet all of London's social housing targets. We will work to increase and retain prosperity in this part of London. Getting people into work, and the increase in earnings through higher skills once they are in work, is our key means of reducing poverty. Within 20 years, we want the east end of London to have achieved no less than economic convergence with the rest of the capital.

Focus on employment

We have seen a rapid increase in the employment rate in Hackney over the last few years. We've still got a way to go, but we're closing the gap with the rest of London. Over the last three years the percentage of people in work has risen by eight points. The increase in London over the same period has been one percentage point.

Rather than job supply, we have identified engagement of the long-term out of work as the single biggest challenge in Hackney and took an innovative approach through our City Strategy Pathfinder (CSP) programme.

We use social housing outreach teams to provide a single point of access and local delivery which signposts tenants to a range of pre-work training and development, and then on to sustainable jobs. This means knocking on doors of people who haven't worked for 25 years, and asking them why not. So far this year, we have contacted 2,000 people and are on track to hit the target of 600 into training or work.

This project is unique and effective because holistic services are delivered locally through our ALMO and six of the largest Registered Social Landlords in the borough. We are removing the barriers for residents, who no longer have to navigate between different service providers in order to secure a meaningful job. Residents are told about real vacancies that have been secured by the CSP; employers are given a better service as prospective employees are screened, trained and given additional support to suit employers' needs.

Future regeneration policy

As *primus inter pares*, local government, with its clear understanding of local challenges, must lead the way on regeneration policy and implementation; more councils than ever have achieved the competence needed to invest and regenerate neighbourhoods, to engage with their communities, to show community leadership. However, without the resources that have been available for the past decade they will have to be more innovative, working across agencies and sectors, and persuading government to bend existing mainstream resources in the same way that local government has been encouraged to do for years.

As a priority, our overarching policy cannot be just one of establishing equality of opportunity but also opportunity of place. Being the child of second generation unemployed parents should not consign that child to poor housing, a bad neighbourhood and inadequate schooling, otherwise the odds of repeating the same pattern of economic deprivation become overwhelming.

The approach isn't about artificial job creation, nor welfarism, but it is most definitely about intervention. It is about meaningful engagement, participation and, ultimately, achieving civic pride both within the borough and the individual.

3 *Labour can set the country free through sport*

Rt Hon Andy Burnham MP

It is only three years till one of the greatest sporting shows on earth comes to this country in the shape of the Olympic and Paralympic Games. If ever there was an opportunity to galvanise the sporting outlook of the nation then this is it. We are a country that loves its sport but, arguably, we are one that loves watching it more than we love playing it. And this is something that I want to change.

In the run up to 2012 we want to build a world leading community sport system in this country and increase the number of people – young and old – playing sport regularly. It is a time to set a new level of ambition for sport and change for good its place in our society. This is a new era of unprecedented opportunity and our vision is simple to give more people of all ages and abilities the opportunity to participate in high quality competitive sport at a local level.

To deliver this vision we need an integrated sporting system that will nurture and develop sporting talent, underpinned by a quality club and competition structure as we recognise and re-prioritise right across the sporting landscape, from school sport through community sport to elite performance.

We want to get 1 million more people participating in 30 minutes of sport three times a week and give every young person in England the opportunity to participate in 5 hours of sport in school and in community sports clubs.

For too long the sporting infrastructure in this country has just not been focused enough. There was no integrated landscape and no real sense of partnership - of organisations working together with shared goals, rather a collection of competing interests.

Local delivery was hit and miss with no clear defining policy; there was confusion over sport and physical activity and far too many layers of bureaucracy for clubs to apply for funding. I saw first-hand in the mid-1980s how after-school sport was simply allowed to crumble away. Not just fewer opportunities to play sport, but fewer places too. Playing fields sold off in their thousands. It was an era when the country's sporting fabric went into serious decline.

In the past there was a risk that talented young athletes would slip through the net because the system was not in place to take them to the next level. On leaving school young people would give up on sport because no one had pointed them to local community sports, clubs where participation rates among women have been low with many taking the view that sport is just not for them.

Local authority key indicators

Sport is such a powerful force for good in the community. It brings people together from all walks of life, can offer young people something positive to put their energies into and of course there are the obvious health benefits.

But I want to get more people taking up sport, simply for the love of it too. For me when you play sport, you play to win and it is this 'playing to win' ethos that I want everyone involved in community sport to embrace.

We are doing our part from central Government. We have, through a major reform of Sport England, developed a bold new community sport strategy that will help realise our ambition of delivering a modern club structure at a local level.

Sport England will act more strategically as a commissioner of sports development, striking a new partnership with each of the national governing bodies. We are investing close to half a billion pounds of public money direct to over 40 sports national governing bodies to spend on grassroots sport.

It's the sports governing bodies – like the Football Association, Amateur Swimming Association and Rugby Football Union – which are the experts after all. But in return for the millions of pounds in funding each is to receive comes accountability.

Sports will have to show that they are working hard to increase sports participation as well as finding and developing talent. A failure to step up to the plate will mean that future public funding will be at risk.

In short this is about more sports opportunities for all through a welcoming and accessible club structure. I want the governing bodies to give young people from all backgrounds a good grounding in a sport's basics.

With the encouragement and knowledge of good coaches young people

will have the best chance to improve and this will enhance their sporting experience. It will encourage them to play sport for life.

In the run up to 2012 Sport England along with Sports Coach UK are working hard to recruit up to 10,000 community sports coaches that will help strengthen sport in local areas.

We want to have a more professional approach to coaching in this country. The thousands of volunteer coaches we have are crucial in ensuring that community sport happens up and down the country, week-in-week-out and we want more people to get involved on this front. But we also want there to be more opportunities for people to become full-time coaches as their chosen profession.

Good sports facilities are vital if we are going to get the nation more active but the picture is a much healthier one than it was years ago. Since 2001 over £1 billion of exchequer and lottery funding has been invested into over 4,000 facilities, either new or refurbished.

Now 90 per cent of the population in England are within 20 minutes travel time of two quality sports facilities such as swimming pools, synthetic turf pitches or sports halls.

But we are not stopping there. Last summer I announced a £140 million Government investment so that the millions in England who are over 60 and 16 and under can swim for free from April 1st. This is a fantastic initiative with funding secured from across Whitehall, and as part of this £60 million will be going to local authorities to invest in upgrading local swimming pools.

Local authorities have a big role to play in improving the sporting landscape in this country. When I am around the country visiting various grass roots projects I am quick to stress to them the importance of sport and for them to put it higher up their agenda.

It's encouraging that 80 local authorities have cited sport provision as a performance indicator on which they will be judged but it would be fantastic if even more councils also had sport as one of their main priorities.

As well as funding facilities through national governing bodies, Sport England also has a separate central pot of £10 million earmarked for improving

facilities while the Football Foundation invests tens of millions of pounds each year on state-of-the-art sport pitches that are fantastic all-weather surfaces that are used all year round by the local community.

The Building Schools for the Future programme, that is to touch every secondary school in the land, will also mean more modern sports facilities across the country which will also be open to the wider community.

By 2010 the Government wants all schools as part of their extended schools provision to provide wider community facilities, including sports facilities. We have committed £840 million to help develop extended services and over 7000 schools have engaged in developing extended services.

All schools are now covered by one of England's 450 School Sport Partnerships – this includes 450 Partnership Development Managers, over 3,200 School Sport Co-ordinators and a network of 225 Competition Managers.

And we are seeing the results. 90 per cent of children and young people are now doing at least 2 hours of high quality PE and sport a week. This compares to only a quarter participating in 2 hours in 2002, competitive sport is on the increase in all year groups: 41 per cent of pupils took part in competitive sports fixtures between schools – up from 35 per cent last year.

Our ambition is to now offer 5 hours of high quality PE and sport per week to every child who wants it through the schools but also through providing diverse sporting opportunities in a range of community settings. Local Authorities can help to build the links between clubs and schools and help set the standards for young people to lead and volunteer in sport and look at ways in which more coaches can be deployed in school and community settings.

In the current economic climate local authorities will be scrutinising their budgets but in my view investment in sport should not be overlooked but encouraged.

A nation playing sport regularly would alleviate some of the burden on the NHS and help tackle obesity. It's great to see more sport centres opening up with links to Primary Care Trusts and doctors are now going to be giving advice on sport and physical activity to their patients too. This prevention as well as cure approach has to reap dividends.

Investment into sport can also help tackle anti-social behaviour and crime. The Football Foundation's Kickz projects are a great example of this. A partnership between professional football clubs and the police, Kickz offers football and other sports to young people in some of the most deprived areas of the country, three times a week. Evidence has shown that anti-social behaviour and minor crime are down on the nights when Kickz sessions are on. This highlights the unique power that sport has to engage with people.

By investing now in school and grass roots sport we are creating a legacy to enable a new generation of people to have more opportunities to have sport embedded in their lives.

Through public investment of over £4 billion over the last decade in school, community and elite sport we have put in place the infrastructure at every level set against a backdrop of a huge investment in facilities and arresting the sale of playing fields.

We have put competitive sport back on the agenda delivering competitive opportunities for all.

Sport has a pull that will always be there and I am convinced that London 2012 will increase the appeal of sport even further. I am under no illusion – to create a world-leading community sport system in this country is not going to be an easy task but I am convinced that with central and local Government in-step and with national governing bodies of sport on board with record investment to spend, we can do it.

4 *How Labour Councils communicate with young people*

Cllr Steve Reed

It should worry all of us in progressive politics that so much of what we communicate to young people is negative. Read the press, whether it's local, regional or national, and it's full of stories about youth gangs, gun-toting teenagers or children going to school armed with knives. Too often, we talk about young people as if they were an alien and malevolent infestation on our streets and estates. The Lib Dems recently sent round a scare-leaflet to residents on a Brixton estate warning them that if Labour opened a new school the area would soon be full of teenagers "hanging around". At the start of this century we are demonising young people and making them bear the burden of perceived social failure just like, in the 1980s, Thatcher's Tories demonised lone parents and immigrants.

What effect must this be having on our young people? Instead of telling them they're our future, which they are, we're telling them we're afraid of them because they're out of control. We prove this by locking them up in numbers not seen elsewhere in Europe, by stopping them in the streets to be searched, or – Boris Johnson's brainwave – by marching them through knife arches at train stations across London.

The fact is the majority of our young people are decent, hard-working and law abiding. Overall youth crime has fallen over the past decade, and there has been no significant increase in violent youth crime over that same period. In our schools, exam results outstrip previous records almost year on year – and our response to that laudable achievement is to tell young people the exams must have been dumbed down for them to have done so well.

We can't go on communicating to the rising generation like this. We need to acknowledge our young people's achievements, understand and support their aspirations, and talk to them as if their lives matter to us as adults. Where there are failures in the lives of young people, those can more often be put down to the failure of adults to provide the support or positive choices young people need.

This was brought home starkly by some research commissioned in Lambeth into the causes of violent gang-related youth crime. The report noted how the adult world lets down a young black boy moving onto a gang-infected estate. Where there are two rival gangs operating on an estate, the new arrival faces just three choices. Join one gang for protection, and the other is out to get you. Join the second, and he's prey to the first. Join neither, and the young man is subject to assault from both gangs. His rational choice is to join one of the gangs for some degree of protection. But once in membership, he is required to prove his loyalty by carrying out a sequence of activities involving him in rising levels of anti-social behaviour and crime – selling drugs, snatching handbags, even beating people up. For his own safety, and wrongly, he feels obliged to carry a knife. Having given this young man no real choices, and assuming he's not knifed beforehand, the adult world may eventually catch him and lock him up. His life chances are destroyed while the community around him bears the scars of his behaviour. Is that really his failure or is it ours?

Talk to young people and they will tell you what matters to them, what scares them and what they hope to achieve. Lambeth trained a group of young people to consult their peers. The results were unsurprising. Young people in our inner city areas want safe places to socialise, education and training that leads to well paid jobs, and a decent place to live and eventually bring up a family of their own. They worry most about crime and ending up in low-paid work or on the dole. Their concerns were barely different to those of any other group of citizens.

So how can we communicate more positively with young people, involve them in designing the services that matter to them, and hand them more power over their own lives? Many local authorities now have their own youth councils and some, like Lambeth, a directly-elected youth mayor. This sends a very positive message to young people. It says that we, as adults in authority, value them and care about what they think. No role has credibility without control over at least some resources, so Lambeth's youth mayor and youth council have a direct budget of £25,000 and influence over a budget of nearly £8 million we spend on youth services.

Over 3500 young people voted in Lambeth's recent youth mayor election in February this year, using polling stations set up in local schools or voting online. Over 4000 voted in the most recent young mayor election in Labour-

led Tower Hamlets. In all the boroughs using this model of engagement, young people secured nomination as candidates and stood on platforms arguing for more investment in those services young people care about. Top of their list is personal safety and better universal youth facilities. This model of engagement not only gives young people a clearer voice, it also gives them direct experience of how to vote so that polling stations will feel less alien once they are old enough to take part in local or national elections.

What the candidates for youth mayor had to say about themselves was telling. They clearly feel frustrated at how the media demonised young people. In their manifestos one candidate writes: "I want to show we are not all knife-carrying thugs as we are portrayed in the media. I want to show people our good side". Another writes: "When I was younger I was not looking forward to becoming [a teenager] because the media never promotes the positives about youths. Now that I am a teenager, I really appreciate and recognise that there are so many positive things about being a youth: the learning; the opportunities; and the fact that we are the leaders of tomorrow – it's so exciting!" How terrible that we are scaring young people away from their own futures.

Young people are interested in politics. I was struck, touring three local schools in recent weeks, at the number of wall posters, badges and stickers featuring Barack Obama. He has inspired young people to feel they can make a difference if only they had the chance. It's not politics that puts young people off, it's the way adults talk down to them and exclude them.

With two decades of under-investment in youth services since the Thatcher government made spending discretionary, it's no wonder young people feel the lack of services so keenly. Too many councils cut their youth budgets in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Without any immediate negative effects – after all, young people can't vote against them – these seemed easy cuts to make. Two decades later, too many vulnerable young people grow up without a safety net and the rest of society is left to deal with the consequences. The time has come to restore a mandatory minimum level of youth provision in every community.

Young people care about much more than just youth services. They use parks, public gyms and leisure centres, they attend schools, colleges and universities, they need health services including sexual health services,

they enjoy being involved in sport and culture, they need training and apprenticeships to prepare them for work, and they need better housing than the slum accommodation many young people are forced into when they first leave home or the overcrowded flats too many of them grow up in, especially on social housing estates.

In all these areas, we need to strengthen the voice of young people if we are going to understand and meet their real needs. In Lambeth, we run a programme of youth peer inspections of local services. Groups of young people are trained to survey and consult other young people out in the places where they are using public services. They are then helped to compile their findings into reports that are fed back to those responsible for the services. It helps to make our services more responsive and it communicates a positive message of intent back to the young people themselves.

Empowerment is a key theme in progressive politics, and it must apply to young people too. If we want them to grow up responsibly, we need to show them we believe them to be responsible. Instead of services that are delivered top-down, we can work with young people through voluntary and community organisations so they can help design and deliver the services themselves. One of the most successful projects of this kind in the country is Lambeth's X-it Programme. This is a joint community-Council-Police project on a tough inner-city estate in Brixton. Young people who were previously in trouble with the police are trained to act as mentors to other young people who are starting to get involved in offending behaviour. They talk to them about where their lives are heading, what problems they are facing, and what they want to do in the future. Then they help direct them into activities, projects and schemes that help them get their lives back on track. For some of them, this involvement brings them the first experience of success or achievement, and recognition from adults, in their lives.

The programme has a 72 per cent success rate in preventing reoffending and we're now rolling it out across the whole borough. It works because the young people involved in delivering the service possess the credibility and reach into the most affected communities that established public authorities simply do not have. As a side benefit, but a major one, this approach also develops new skills and interests in the young people who are acting as mentors that can lead them into work, training or education.

Communication is an important part of empowerment. It's not just a matter of what we communicate, but how and where. Young people are much more interested in new forms of communication than people who are older. They communicate online on social networking sites like Facebook, Bebo and Myspace. They 'twitter' – an online system that allows users to post frequent, short messages that others can follow.

They increasingly want to run their own magazines, newspapers, radio or even TV stations, and changes in media production techniques that have lowered costs make all this more possible than ever before. Even the very youngest children can have their voices heard if we develop innovative models like the 'play and say' events pioneered by Involve, where children's views are sampled unobtrusively while they attend a local play event.

We need to question, too, our readiness to lock young people up for failures that are not merely personal to them but are also the result of social policy. A lack of opportunity is never an excuse for crime, but it is certainly a driver behind it. Instead of criminalising young people, we need to invest in more detached youth workers, more diversionary projects, more youth activities that help young people develop positive, healthy interests. Young people growing up in overcrowded flats on estates have nowhere to go and run around. They need open spaces, sports facilities, structured sport activities, gyms at affordable prices, where they can use their energy without being left on the streets where it's all too easy for them to fall prey to gang members or others who want to direct them into trouble.

The single most vulnerable group of young people are those in care. These young people are the most over-represented in the prison system, in the sex trade, and have the lowest educational achievement. We not only need to tackle the failures in the care system that lead to this, but we must also acknowledge that corporate parenting – councils' responsibility for their young people in care – can no longer end when the young person leaves care. It needs to continue through their early adulthood so they have someone to return to for help, support or advice when it's needed just like other young people can turn to their parents or full-time carers.

What can the Labour Party learn from the good work of many Labour councils? First, that young people are interested in politics as long as we

engage them on their terms. That means getting away from the dull, poorly-attended monthly branch meeting and looking instead at local campaigns run by young people, and forums for young people both in the real world and online. Young people need support for their ambitions from their Labour councillors whether they're in power or in opposition. It also means actively encouraging young people to stand for election to local councils so their voices are heard through the Labour Party.

More widely, we must remember that how we communicate with young people is intimately linked to what we say about them and how we involve them in designing and delivering the services they use. Our starting point must be that young people deserve positive choices that allow them to realise and meet their own aspirations. Where there is failure it's because those choices don't exist. We need to look first to ourselves and our failure in policy and communication in allowing that to happen before taking the easy option and blaming the young people themselves. Young people want to build a better world. Let's make sure the Labour Party is the tool that allows them to do that.

5 *A new approach to regions*

Cllr Stephen Houghton

Regionalists go where angels fear to tread. At least that seems to be the case after numerous attempts to redefine the role of the regions in our democratic processes.

The experiences of the North East referendum and open hostility to some form of regional governance from parts of both Central and Local Government has made it difficult to have an open and informed debate about regionalism, its purpose and its potential benefit. It has left us with a series of policies and structures which – however well intended – are often complex and confusing and in many places have created a deep unpopularity.

The recently published Sub National Review was a step forward in trying to bring some sense and order to the governance map, but it has still left the development of the regional agenda in the hands of many who are at best sceptical and at worst hostile to its concept. So is there a way forward or are we to be left ruing another missed opportunity.

I suspect that the fact these matters are still being examined (by the NLGN at least!) means that all is not lost, but if we are to move forward we must learn from past mistakes if a sceptical political class are to be convinced and more importantly an often hostile electorate.

We clearly need therefore to lay out a new narrative for Regionalism. One which in simple terms gives the reasons why and explains the potential benefits. Moreover one which shows regional governance is not about extra cost, politics and bureaucracy but is about leadership, economic prosperity, efficiency and accountability. Things which we often talk about but which are missing as we speak.

A Constitutional Convention

Before looking at what the details of future regional governance may look like it is essential to understand the significant political obstacle it faces. Namely its impact on current governance structures. One of the problems we face with

any change to our governance arrangements be they Central or Local is the fact that they are interlinked. Change one part of the system and there are consequences somewhere else. This problem has bedevilled Government in the UK for generations and the lack of a genuine consensus of what is best decided where has meant any move to create a regional tier has been doomed from the onset with enemies being created both centrally and locally.

If we are serious about providing a narrative for regional governance we must accept there will be an impact both elsewhere and that impact will have to be understood, managed and in the end accepted.

What is needed as a consequence of this is (ideally) some national understanding of what works best and at what level, what the technocrats call 'subsidiarity', be that policy and strategy, or be it investment planning and service delivery.

It seems to me that the best (and perhaps the only) way to achieve this is through a national constitutional convention.

If all parts of our governance structures could be engaged in such a process – and some form of common understanding achieved as to what fits best and where – then we could be well on our way to not only sensible regional governance but a governance map fit for the future at all levels.

Indeed such an understanding could provide Local Government with the type of long term security it craves for – namely – the absence of interference from the centre which has been the hallmark of all Governments over the years. It could also mean political debate can concentrate on achieving real outcomes for real people, rather than spending much of its time debating structures and processes as has often been the case with Local Government and the House of Lords Reform being just two examples. However with the absence of such a debate and the need to make progress what can we do?

What and Why? A New Narrative

The fact is we have previously failed to advocate a clear rationale for regional governance. Even in the 1992 Labour Manifesto where there was a clear political commitment, there did not exist a clear policy framework beneath it.

The lessons from the North East referendum exposed this lack of substance and some of the reasons for regionalisms unpopularity. First, the lack of

genuine powers on offer; and second, extra politicians being created at extra cost. Who would vote for that?

Equally the lack of identity in some regions – particularly in the South – exposed the current regional model to be less than ideal as a basis for decision-making or the development of strategy. This traditional regional map with its uneasy mix of urban and rural as well as party politics has made it difficult to achieve common identity and anything other than lowest common denominator decision-making in many cases.

So if revolution is not possible can we achieve more through evolution? There are those such as John Healey and Ed Balls who argue that new ways of working are more important than structures and that the City Regions offer a more identifiable and manageable solution to the previous regional models. Moreover, they suggest by allowing different regions to move at different paces the more sceptical have the chance to witness the benefits elsewhere (where regionalism is more accepted) before being asked to comment.

So what should these new City Regional Tiers try to achieve?

The Government's position has been made clear already that a regional 'tier' is needed:

- to reflect economic activity and performance and to attempt to achieve the full potential of the economy
- to develop strategy on policy and spatial development and to plan and integrate investment decisions.
- to optimise use of resources in investments and spending.

All very strategic and some City Regions have become strongly engaged in the process, however I cannot help to feel that there is still something missing. Firstly, strategically regional policy needs to recognise geography and that it affects life chances and so Regional Tiers need to be able to design services and policies to reflect this.

Secondly, this cannot be achieved without many of the quangos currently in operation being brought under this umbrella and being made accountable for their actions.

Thirdly, there are some existing 'Local Government' services such as fire, police and ambulance services are already migrating towards a regional basis and could form part of a sensible regional tier – this already happens in the London region.

Thus whilst current Regional and City Region models have made some progress, further work is needed if they are to be truly effective. However if we are to evolve new City Region models and give them new powers then the membership and accountability of these models is incredibly important.

Some academics argue that directly elected governance is necessary to secure policies matched to the diversity of regional conditions and to provide strong political leadership and consensus building. There is also a strong impetus for structural accountability given the sheer number and spending power of the organisations and quangos which could be assembled under the City Region model if Government were to permit it.

At the higher Regional tier, current models of Leaders Boards has brought some accountability and transparency and there has been some attempt to reach a regional consensus. However progress has been limited. Council leaders are elected to represent their own areas and inevitably they find themselves needing a local story to tell as well as, if not instead of, a regional one. This makes progress slow.

The recent referendum on congestion charging in the Manchester area confirms this problem. The City Region did not have the whole hearted support of all the authorities involved and the leadership needed by the pro lobby becomes difficult if not impossible to achieve with Councillors in each of the districts concerned not just with the debate itself but its political impact on their own Councils. Indeed one prominent advocate for congestion charging lost his seat following a concerted campaign by an interested business organisation in his Ward.

Thus the vulnerability of local Councillors and Councils suggest the leadership of the City Region may need to come from elsewhere if those difficult challenges which lay ahead are to be faced.

The London Region has of course the Mayoral model and this has given it both high profile leadership and decision-making. It is also accountable

directly to the public. Is this model transferable to other City Regions? Or should there be a small elected executive in place of the Mayor?

Certainly many of the functions of the London model could be repeated albeit, the scrutiny of the Mayor, or Executive, could be considerably improved using existing Council leaders.

The point I am trying to make here is that if we can, over time, become clear about what we are trying to achieve at the regional level, we need decision-making and accountability around it which is focused on the Region as a whole and not fettered by local or national preferences and pressures.

Regional Funding

Regional funding falls into two categories. Firstly, the costs of operating a new tier of governance and secondly, the funds at its disposal. In relation to the operational costs of a powerful City Region tier these could easily be borne by the savings made on quango governance that would come from bringing them under an accountable tier. Indeed, I would argue there would be net savings from such an approach as well as greater accountability for that expenditure.

The second area is more complex and I suspect reform of regional funding could only be done with some form of elected governance as suggested earlier.

This would be particularly important if regional tiers are able to precept on local councils for regional services such as ones mentioned earlier. However, if Regional Bodies were to be effective not only should they be able to shape policy and strategy around regional need the spending within that needs to be flexible to follow these paths. Such flexibility is currently hindered in a number of areas and so the development of such powers would require clear accountability and transparency of decision-making.

Multi Area Agreements (MAAs) are the beginnings of flexible regional funding and strategies but there are still questions around those non Local Government bodies desire, or ability, to participate and the single pot which was to be devolved by RDAs to local partnerships does not feature in the Economic Development Bill. Neither do MAAs, however desirable, have the

democratic transparency or accountability of an elected regional tier and whilst they are to be welcomed as a step in the right direction they can be no more than that (Indeed they face the same problem of locality versus region as I previously described).

I would suggest therefore that at this stage having the ability to join up current regional expenditure res in a flexible and coherent way is more important than demanding more money into the regional tier.

Conclusions

The notion of regional governance is very much on the political back foot. If we are to see real progress we will need a strong and clear narrative on its rationale and benefits. This would better come from a new national understanding of our governance overall than a piecemeal approach. But given the current climate the evolutionary model probably offers the only way forward at this time. However, even here there is a need for Government to offer more than just the better joining up of local strategies.

Regional geography affects peoples lives and their life chances. As such it requires the power to design its own policies and strategies in areas beyond those currently on offer and to be able to spend its resources accordingly – albeit within some agreement with the centre.

In turn this requires new if small executive arrangements and accountability around well understood and identifiable geographies, such as the City Regions.

Such powers may well prove attractive to parts of our country and a real opportunity to tackle the regional disparities which exist and provide clear strong and accountable leadership. Central Government needs to make the offer and Local Government needs to take up the challenge.

6 *Leading Lancashire*

Cllr Hazel Harding

Lancashire is a very special place with many unique characteristics. It is the fourth largest local authority in the country, with a population of over a million people. It is marked by outstanding landscapes and a welcoming culture. It is a growing society with a hugely diverse population. It has a strong manufacturing heritage that has changed to meet the demands of current manufacturing and service economy needs. It is generally an affluent county, but still has some areas of deep rooted deprivation.

Lancashire County Council (LCC) operates in a three tier local government structure; within our boundaries there are 12 district councils and 189 town and parish councils. There are also two unitary authorities (Blackburn and Darwen and Blackpool), 15 local strategic partnerships, five primary care trusts and pan-Lancashire emergency services. In addition, there are over 3,000 voluntary, community and faith sector organizations.

As community leaders, our uniqueness and complex structures bring us many challenges. However, we all share a pride in our county and a determination to use our roles to achieve the best possible outcomes for the people we represent.

Our approach to Community Leadership helps us to develop responsive, efficient and effective ways of working which are sensitive to the diverse needs of 'our place'. It has four elements:

- Strong and effective political leadership at our corporate centre.
- Empowered individual county councillors.
- A leading partner: strong and influential.
- Working together with the people of Lancashire to 'make life better'.

Strong and effective political leadership at the Corporate Centre requires us to be responsive to the people we represent. Prior to taking office in 2001, a

MORI poll had highlighted high levels of public satisfaction with our services, but a sense that the County Council was seen to be remote and inaccessible. We needed to rise to the key challenge of re-engaging at a local level with the communities of Lancashire. Our 'Locality Focus Programme' was launched which focuses on: working effectively with partners; engaging at the appropriate local level; opening ourselves up to the public; and supporting councillors as community advocates.

Under this agenda we have developed an extensive programme of activities including one to one meetings with each district council leader in Lancashire and regular joint meetings of all 15 leaders. This work in particular has helped to improve trust and understanding between the county and district councils and has paved the way for the creation of Team Lancashire.

Team Lancashire (TL) is a coming together of the leaders and chief executives of all 15 authorities in Lancashire. As community leaders, we work together to aim for more effective and efficient service delivery across the tiers of local government in Lancashire. We also provide a strong lobbying and influencing voice for Lancashire. TL was recently awarded beacon status for our work to build 'cohesive and resilient communities' in Lancashire. We were also finalists in the Local Government Chronicle Awards for 'Local Leadership'.

Cabinet in the Community has helped us re-engage at the local level by taking our Cabinet out of County Hall and into the community, touring the County and taking part in question and answer sessions with local citizens. These events are supported by the local press and are hosted by a BBC reporter so that they feel different to traditional Cabinet meetings and really engage the public in a lively and innovative way.

Empowered frontline councillors are central to effective community leadership. 'Lancashire Locals' have proved to be a critical factor in 'empowering' frontline members and improving their capacity to lead at a local level. Introduced in 2006, these are joint committees comprising all county councillors in a district and an equal number of district councillors. Together, they are empowered to influence, monitor and take decisions about county council services in their area including: local safety schemes, the allocation of budgets for highway projects, the prioritisation and deployment of youth resources within available budgets and the allocation of grants to

local groups and organizations. Many of the key features of the model are unique in two tier areas. In particular, they are locally representative so some locals are wholly controlled by opposition parties.

We have given all elected members a small budget of their own to support community groups and fund projects of their choice. We have also established member champion roles giving some county councillors additional responsibilities – and a small budget – to represent and champion the needs of (for example) younger people, older people and parish and town councils. Our member champion for parish and town councils has recently funded the provision of some IT equipment for a rural parish council in the Ribble Valley, and a county wide conference for all parishes. Our member champion for young people recently allocated some of their budget towards a BMX track in Burnley and a young person's theatre group in Rossendale.

A well established member development and training programme provides ongoing support to all councillors through a variety of different activities. We also have a mobile unit that tours the county with local councillors. They are able listen to the public and answer questions about county council services. This year we have undertaken 21 visits across the County, seeing approximately 9,139 visitors.

We have initiated a series of guided tours within each district to help our members gain an appreciation of the breadth of diversity across the county and to get a first hand understanding of the issues we are all lobbying hard to tackle within our own patch. By raising levels of awareness of county wide and local community issues and promoting understanding of diversity, county councillors are equipped to better serve their local community and have a greater understanding of the wider strategic issues that we as community leaders must address.

Developing a leading role on partnerships is also a key part of our approach to community leadership. We have established a strong role for the county council amongst its partners, specifically on the Lancashire Partnership, which I chair. A number of our Cabinet Members chair themed groups of the Partnership. Chairs of district Local Strategic Partnerships are also represented on the Partnership, which in most cases are district council leaders. This helps to ensure that members play an active role in the

partnership and the development of the Local Area Agreement (LAA). We were recently awarded Beacon Status for “raising economic prosperity through partnership”. I’m particularly proud that we have established over 220 Apprenticeships over the last two years, compared to 6 in 2006, and that our partnership has helped 43 people claiming long term incapacity and lone parent benefit into our ‘Workstart’ programme.

We have also been an active partner on the development of two Multi Area Agreements (MAAs) in Lancashire: Pennine Lancashire MAA (now signed off) and the Fylde Coast MAA (intended for summer sign off). We have worked hard with our partners to ensure they ‘add value’ over and above the Lancashire Area Agreement.

Working together with the people of Lancashire to make life better is fundamental to our community leadership approach. There are many terms used for this: engagement, consultation, involvement, empowerment, neighbourhood working! However, I believe it is essentially about working with people to ensure our services are shaped around their needs. We have developed many approaches to this in Lancashire and are proud of our ‘tradition’ in this area. We were recently awarded beacon status for ‘positive engagement of older people to support and promote greater independence and wellbeing in later life’.

Our Customer Access Strategy has been developed to ensure that everyone can get help and information on all the county council’s services conveniently and efficiently. It has four streams of activity which are: putting the customer first; telephone contact; face to face contact and self service. Actions are being implemented around each of these themes to support the aims of the Strategy – actions that can make a real difference to the people of Lancashire.

A key principle underpinning the Lancashire Local Area Agreement is the ‘active engagement of communities and citizens’. This is demonstrated by the inclusion of both National Indicator 4 (percentage of people who feel that they can influence decisions in a locality) and National Indicator 7 ‘Environment for a thriving third sector’ in our Local Area Agreement.

We are making our decision making procedures more transparent and encourage our citizens to get involved in shaping the services in their area. This is evidenced by our commitment to web casting full council and overview

and scrutiny meetings. Members of the public are encouraged to attend our Lancashire Locals where they are encouraged to express views on items on the agenda in order to influence the decision making process. We have also developed a Parish and Town Council Charter; this represents an agreement with our Parishes about how we can best work together to harness their ability to connect at the very local level.

How best can we build on these approaches, and develop our approach to community leadership? The key challenge facing us in the future is providing effective community leadership through difficult economic times. To quote Barack Obama in his speech about current economic problems “We must not miss the opportunity to lead”. As local community leaders, I believe this applies to us too.

We will be using our community leadership role to try to secure the best possible outcomes for the people of Lancashire in the tough times ahead. We will need to address the impact of the recession on individuals and families and also on the business sector and the local economy. We will also be exercising our leadership role to ensure that Lancashire is well prepared to take full advantage of opportunities that will undoubtedly arise from economic recovery. We will be developing a very clear strategy for future regeneration and economic development, putting Lancashire County Council firmly at the helm of economic growth and sustainable development. We will use our community leadership role to build on our track record of supporting Lancashire’s third sector.

This will involve facilitating (where there is a local desire and need) the transfer of community buildings into community ownership and management. By doing this, we can empower local groups to develop projects in their own communities that meet real local need as we work together through tough economic times ahead. Our elected members will be an integral part of this process.

We have plans to ‘grow’ our devolution initiative so that each district Lancashire Local Committee is able to develop their own ‘tailored’ constitution that meets individual local need, rather than a ‘one size fits all’ approach. I believe that this will further empower local councillors as ‘community leaders’ to address local problems and priorities. This approach

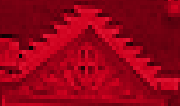
will also see us piloting some new approaches to locality working which will allow us to re-prioritise and re-focus our services in a much more flexible and proactive way.

Of course, we will continue our tradition of 'working together with the people of Lancashire'. We have already started work on responding to the new 'duty to involve', 'duty to promote democracy' and 'councillor call for action'. Working with partners will continue to be a key part of our approaches. Over the past few years, I believe that the drive and determination of our political team has helped to empower individual county councillors to make a real difference in their communities. Crucially, the community leaders of Lancashire all share a pride in our county, a sense of ambition for the future, and a determination to make it happen.

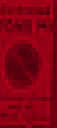


JAMES HARRISON LTD

CANNON



JAMES HARRISON LTD





As part of a series of cross-party political pamphlets, this collection brings together Labour Ministers and council leaders to discuss how the party can develop policies at the local level. Contributors include Andy Burnham MP, Hazel Blears MP, Cllr Hazel Harding, Cllr Stephen Houghton, Mayor Jules Pipe and Cllr Steve Reed.

Through this series of pamphlets we hope to provoke debate and discussion within the main political parties on how to take the localism agenda forward.

We are pleased to produce this pamphlet in conjunction with Progress